

## EIP Operational Group Inishowen Upland Farmers

A whole farm approach to promote more joined up thinking about farming alongside nature, whilst maintaining a viable farm income.

### EAFRD-funded projects

**Location:** Inishowen Peninsula, Ireland

**Programming period:** 2014-2020

**Priority:** P1 - Knowledge transfer and innovation

**Focus Area:** Innovation and cooperation

**Measures:** M16 - Cooperation

**Funding:** RDP support: 989 500 (EUR)

**Timeframe:** 01/2019 - 12/2023

**Project promoter:** Inishowen Uplands EIP  
Operational Group\*

\*The project promoter/beneficiary is an [EIP-AGRI Operational Group](#)

**Email:** [inishoweneip@gmail.com](mailto:inishoweneip@gmail.com)



© Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP project

### Summary

Farming on the Inishowen Peninsula, located in County Donegal, on the North West coast of Ireland, is currently facing many difficulties due to insufficient farm incomes, an ageing farming population and a lack of succession planning, for example. Whilst government support in the form of Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Areas of Natural Constraint (ANCs) payments and agri-environmental schemes such as Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) are essential forms of income, many farmers in the area also have an off-farm income to remain viable due to low returns on their farming activities, such as suckler farming and sheep production. This difficulty in generating a sufficient full-time income from farming alone is a situation that is reflected throughout Ireland.

The Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP Project, through its 23 participant farmers, has tested innovative actions that deliver economic returns whilst also rewarding them for producing and enhancing public goods such as water quality, flood mitigation, biodiversity enhancement and climate change mitigation.

### Project results

- The Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP Operational Group has been successful in increasing the profitability and sustainability of farms in the Inishowen Peninsula, as well as improving biodiversity, flood mitigation and climate mitigation.

### Key lessons and recommendations

- Red clover can also fix up to 150-200 kg N/ha in the soil, reducing or eliminating fertiliser costs.
- Farmers were keen to add agroforestry plots to farms as long as it acts as a benefit to their existing farm practices.
- Upland cattle grazing can be a useful tool in improving the quality of upland habitats for many ground nesting birds. It also reduces the risk of fires while simultaneously providing an additional grazing platform for farmers who had stopped grazing cattle in the uplands prior to engaging in the project.





© Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP project

## Context

The Inishowen Peninsula is located in County Donegal, on the North-West coast of Ireland. There are 2 688 farmers in the Inishowen Peninsula, farming on varied land typologies across a wide range of agricultural enterprises, of which suckler and sheep farming are the predominant systems. The area is dominated by High Nature Value (HNV) farmland and has an average farm size of 27 hectares. In keeping with national trends, many farmers have off-farm income, there is an ageing farming population and there are concerns over a lack of successors due to poor economic returns.

Following a local meeting between stakeholders to seek a way to improve farming conditions in the area, a group of local farmers and other stakeholders put forward an EIP-AGRI proposal to develop innovative measures to increase profits whilst also improving biodiversity, water quality, flood mitigation and the fight against climate change. A locally led, farmer-centred legal entity was subsequently set up to run the Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP Project.

## Objectives

The ultimate aim of the Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP Project was to increase farm profitability in the local area by reducing costs and maximising returns. The project also intended to demonstrate that this can be achieved in tandem with delivering on climate change, biodiversity and water quality, as well as flood mitigation, by testing innovative practices such as agroforestry in the upland areas of the Inishowen Peninsula, as well as climate smart innovation on the more lowland areas.

## Activities

Twenty-five farmers participated in the Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP Operational Group, located in various regions throughout the Inishowen peninsula. These farmers have the discretion to decide on how many measures they wish to implement on their farm as part of this locally led project.

The project implements five actions in a targeted fashion to deliver the greatest environmental and economic results. These include:

- Agroforestry - trees are added to farms to improve shelter, water quality and biodiversity, as well as to provide an extra income stream. There are many benefits to having trees on the farm, such as extending the grazing season, disease control and improved water infiltration.
- Diverse swards - incorporation of diverse mixes of grasses, clovers and herbs can reduce fertiliser costs and improve farm profits. Diverse swards also improve water infiltration due to the deep rooting abilities of some species sown. Improved liveweight gain for cattle and sheep will also reduce meal feeding requirements, reducing costs on the farm. The anthelmintic properties of the herbs in the mix also reduce the need to treat animals for worms.
- Red clover silage has a greater protein percentage compared to grass silage (16% vs 12%) thus reducing meal costs. Red clover can also fix up to 150-200 kg N/Ha in the soil, reducing or eliminating fertiliser costs.
- Upland cattle - cattle were traditionally grazed on the uplands of Inishowen 50-60 years ago. Cattle are added back to the hills and commonages to help improve the habitat quality, reduce fire burdens and increase biodiversity. Cattle are grazed in the summer months when fields are closed for silage, thus increasing the grazing platform area and reducing fertiliser costs.
- Farm ponds - farm ponds are the greatest contributor to biodiversity on farms. Ponds can also be utilised to improve water quality through capturing sediment and nutrients from entering main waterways and streams.







© Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP project

## Main results

The Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP Operational Group has been successful in increasing the profitability and sustainability of farms in the Inishowen Peninsula, as well as improving biodiversity, flood mitigation and climate mitigation, through the following positive and impactful actions:

- Agroforestry - 8 500 trees planted throughout participant farms. and 1 140 metres of hedge planted.
- Diverse swards - 60 hectares of diverse swards sown throughout farms. Increased growth rates in lambs of 0.04 kg/day in lambs finished of diverse swards as well as a reduction in fertiliser costs.
- Red clover - fertiliser costs are further reduced. Weanling cattle gained 0.33 kg daily on red clover silage compared to grass silage.
- Upland cattle - Average Daily Gain (ADG) of cattle in the uplands of 0.6 kg/day, reduces costs by increasing grazing platform and reduces housing costs as cattle can winter on upland areas causing minimal damage.
- Farm ponds - farmers willingly created 26 farm ponds to capture silt and sediment high in upland areas, thereby improving water quality. A scorecard is currently being utilised to further improve the quality and impact of these ponds on waterways of the Inishowen Peninsula.

## Key lessons and recommendations

- Farmers are willing and enthusiastic to participate in a locally led project with actors already known to them due to increased levels of familiarity and trust.
- Innovative farmer-centred project actions have improved the economic viability and sustainability of farms on the peninsula.
- Diverse swards and red clover require a different management technique to traditional perennial grass swards in both grazing and silage. Red clover can also fix up to 150-200 kg N/ha in the soil, reducing or eliminating fertiliser costs.
- Farm ponds can be utilised as an indicator of water quality and can be useful to improve the management of farm practices.
- Farmers are keen to add agroforestry plots to farms as long as it acts as a benefit to their existing farm practices.
- Upland cattle grazing can be a useful tool in improving the quality of upland habitats for many ground nesting birds. It also reduces the risk of fires while simultaneously providing an additional grazing platform for farmers who had stopped grazing cattle in the uplands prior to engaging in the project.
- Some of the Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP Project actions have been taken up by current managing authority schemes under the new CAP Strategic Plan and have been rolled out nationwide under the ACRES Scheme.

*“We hope this project adds to what needs to be done in rural Ireland to keep it alive and protect it for the next generation so that they can farm it.”*

Participating farmer

### Additional information:

[www.InishowenEIP.com](http://www.InishowenEIP.com)

[www.facebook.com/inishowenuplandseip](https://www.facebook.com/inishowenuplandseip)

<https://twitter.com/UplandEip>



Funded by  
the European Union

